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CHALLENGE

THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST NEWSPAPER OF PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY

19 September 2007 Volume 40, No. 14

Suggested Donation U.S. $.50

Mortgage Crisis: Capitalism's Bankruptcy Rips Off Workers

The global financial crisis sparked by the subprime mortgage collapse exposes one of capitalism's basic failures. (The "subprime" term refers to home-buyers being "teased" with initial below-market interest rates, only to be hit with much higher rates after several years, resulting in their inability to pay their mortgages and loss of their homes.) Capitalism's vaunted "free" markets, supposedly the "fairest" and "most efficient" means of allocating wealth and resources, turns out to be dens of thieves. Financiers, seeking maximum profits, continually invent ways to cheat one another — and workers.

It's a story as old as the profit system itself. Details change, but the basic plot continues: Investors bid up a new, overvalued financial product. Some get rich. But, eventually, big capitalists get burned and burst the bubble. The economy slows. Stocks plunge. Companies shrink, go under, or get swallowed up by larger ones. Workers lose jobs. The bigger bosses then consolidate their economic and political control by wiping out or disciplining rival "offenders."

'BUSINESS CYCLE' = CRISIS, PANIC, FRENZY

The 1980's junk-bond frenzy, Enron's fatal venture into "derivatives" — highly risky complex financial contracts; WorldCom's "cooking the books" to inflate the value of their shares; and the dot.com mania all followed this pattern. In the current subprime scam, lenders (both established banks and upstarts) wrote mortgages for workers who had no chance of paying them off. The lenders then packaged these loans with other "securities" and sold them off to major investors throughout the world. When financial titans like U.S. Goldman Sach's, French Societe Generale and British Barclays realized they were holding a lot of worthless paper, they shut down the racket by tightening credit.

Modernization compounded the problem. A broker in Kansas could sell suspect loans online, sight unseen, to another in Paris in seconds. And buyers snapped them up on the recommendation of computerized mathematical models, without inspecting properties or interviewing borrowers.

The fallout is hitting the fan worldwide. Investors face a volatile, uncertain future. Stock markets from New York to Tokyo have been gyrating wildly as companies disclose their various degrees of subprime exposure. Multi-billion-dollar subprime-entangled hedge funds at Bear Stearns and Goldman Sachs have imploded. U.S. home sales and prices are dropping, while housing and related industries account for almost 25% of gross domestic product.

Consequently, more and more workers face unemployment and eviction. The U.S. mortgage industry has lost 40,000 jobs already. According to the Center for Responsible Lending, two million U.S. workers will lose their homes to foreclosure. At the end of July, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 50,000 jobs were lost in the past year among furniture retailers, building-material and garden-supply stores and residential-building finishing contractors. Industries from railroads to chemicals are feeling the effects of the slowdown and laying off workers.

The crisis hits black and Latino workers particularly hard since racist practices victimized them initially with higher mortgage interest rates and home prices as well as greater risk for unemployment. Deutsche Bank economists estimate that 500,000 undocumented Latino construction workers lost their jobs in the U.S. last year (Wall Street Journal, 8/29), decreasing the funds sent back home to Mexico and Central America, affecting those economies as well. (Nearly three million Latino workers account for 25% of the U.S. construction industry workforce.)

The current panic speeds the trend. Tens of millions of workers outside housing and related sectors are also at risk. Pension systems place most of their funds in the increasingly shaky stock and bond markets.

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Newark Killings Spur Bosses' Fight for Fascist Control

NEWARK, NJ, August 20 — PLP, joined by workers and students from Newark and neighboring towns, led a militant multi-racial demonstration to fight the racist attacks of Republican presidential candidate and Minuteman supporter Tom Tancredo who held a press conference on the steps of City Hall here today. A week after the murder of three black college students in Newark (see CHALLENGE, 9/5), Tancredo came here to push more anti-Latino racism to divide black and Latin workers.



Tancredo said Newark politicians had "blood on their hands" because Newark is a "sanctuary" city. City ordinances prohibit police officers from checking the immigration status of people unless they are arrested. City employees cannot report undocumented immigrants to federal authorities. Tancredo and his fellow gutter racists came to urge the families of those who were murdered to sue the city for negligence because of the "sanctuary" ordinances.

Tancredo's approach is not what the liberal rulers, led by Newark Mayor Corey Booker, want. They believe that "community policing," building a stronger "trust" between the immigrant community and the police, is a better way to win all workers to a fascist pro-police outlook.

Of course, it is ridiculous for a long-time racist like Tancredo to pose as a defender of black families. Behind Tancredo is fascist John Tanton, who blames immigrants for overpopulation, and money from right-wing billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife (see "The Puppeteer" at splcenter.org). The Federation of American Immigration Reform (FAIR), one of many anti-immigrant groups started by Tanton, received over $1 million from the pro-Nazi Pioneer Fund that also promoted the "Bell Curve" a racist book that labeled black workers as being too "ignorant" to deserve decent living conditions.

But these racists have very little support in Newark compared to Booker and those behind him. Booker defended his immigration policy by saying that Tancredo's plan would create "a chill in which often the most marginalized and vulnerable citizens in my city do not feel comfortable engaging with the police." As Booker himself stated at a community meeting, he is 100% behind community policing. This program enlists "community leaders" to teach workers to "cooperate" with the police by snitching on other workers. Booker wants lots more cops while Newark lays off hundreds of other city workers. His plan is more dangerous than Tancredo's gutter racism.

As if to prove this point, two days after Tancredo's press conference, super-liberal Attorney General Anne Milgram ordered immigration checks by police in all arrests for indictable offenses and drunk driving. At the same time, she prohibited immigration checks on crime victims, witnesses, or people reporting a crime. This plan fits community policing goals, while simultaneously forcing local cops to work more closely with Homeland Security (HS).

Milgram also encouraged other New Jersey cities to apply for federal permission to deputize local cops for immigration purposes. This is the HS program that racist Morristown Mayor Cresitello supports. As part of the growth of fascism, they need to increasingly bring local cops under the control of the federal government and create centralized databases to control immigrant and other workers.

Speakers at our rally (picture above) pointed to police brutality, racist unemployment, imperialist war, and capitalist culture, not immigrants, as the real problems facing Newark residents. We put forward the only solution for the working class to these problems — getting rid of the capitalist system that causes them with communist revolution. We had good conversations with workers walking by. Many agreed with our politics and bought CHALLENGE. We should have done more in our speeches to attack the liberal rulers — the main section of the bosses who know that, in a period of increasing war, they need to gain the loyalty of the working class, including immigrants. By building class consciousness and communist politics at work, in churches, and in the schools, we can expose the bosses' agenda and recruit to PLP.✪

Stop Racist Railroading of the Jena 6

JENA, LOUISIANA, September 3 — Six black high school students are being framed here and one, Mychal Bell, has already been convicted by a racist judge and jury without calling any witnesses. On September 20, he faces a 22-year prison term, all for daring to stand up to racism. Initial charges of "attempted murder" have been "reduced" to "aggravated second-degree battery" and "conspiracy" which together add up to the 22 years.

Black students at Jena High sat under what had been "reserved" as a "White Only Tree." Soon three nooses were found hanging from the tree, a signal for lynching black people. On September 1, 2006, dozens of black students protested the nooses by standing together under the tree. At a student assembly, a district attorney threatened the protesting students, declaring he could "take away their lives with the stroke of a pen."

Later, a racist jumped a black youth going to a party. Then a black youth was arrested after disarming a racist who threatened him with a gun. A fight erupted between white and black students and six black youths were arrested and charged initially with "attempted murder." Anti-racists nationwide are headed for Jena for the September 20 sentencing of Mychal Bell to protest this racist railroading.

PLP supports this anti-racist struggle, which is part of the growing racist attacks suffered by black, Latino and immigrant workers and youth across the country, linked to the endless war for oil profits. We must raise this fight against racist and fascist terror in our unions, schools, churches and mass organizations. (For source of anti-lynch song "Strange Fruit," see Red Eye, page 7)✪

editorial

Hip-Hop: Rapping to the Bosses' Beat

The attentive listener to hip-hop music finds the message "I am better than you" throughout the art form. From Rakim and KRS in the '80s, through Tupac and Biggie in the '90s, to Jay-Z, T.I. and the rest today, great rappers hammer this point home as they spin tales of "money, power and respect." This "me-first" approach to life is deadly for the working class since it leads us to fight amongst ourselves instead of collectively against the bosses.

But capitalist culture also means the movies, the news, the TV, the music, and the ways we relate to each other. All these forms of culture serve the needs of a capitalist ruling class to chain the working class to their ideas, particularly individualism. So why focus on hip-hop as a bosses' tool?

The evolving Don Imus affair, where the black women of the Rutgers University basketball team were insulted on a nation-wide radio broadcast in horrible, racist terms, must not be forgotten. Imus may get his job back because racism still sells. Backlash against black entertainers who dish out their disgustingly racist and sexist statements and NAACP funerals for the "n-word" also deflect attention away from the source of such filth — U.S. capitalism and its 400-year history of racism and sexism. We must critique rap music because many well-meaning individuals both inside and outside PLP fall for the nationalist trap of failing to sharply denounce hip-hop's bad ideas for fear of seeming racist. Finally, black youth are a key potential force for revolution. Our Party has a responsibility to lead the way in rejecting the racist face black youth are given in popular culture because we see something more, we see future leaders and fighters for a communist world. The sooner all youth make a break with the individualism endemic to hip-hop and all bourgeois culture the closer we will be to revolution.

Racism and sexism are primary tools used by the bosses to divide the working class and keep us oppressed. Capitalists own and control the major record labels and brand names that shower millions on rap artists. It makes sense that mainstream hip-hop helps to perpetuate ideologies that will keep the capitalists in power. Hip-hop helps to criminalize young black men by elevating drug dealers and pimps like 50 Cent and Snoop as archetypes of black manhood. Even Kanye West, who criticized Bush after Katrina, leaves today's youth in a dead-end dreamworld to be achieved "as soon as I get my money." Most hip-hop videos on TV cast women as sex objects. Many rappers, from Jay-Z to Common, blame women for the downfall of men, rather than blame the capitalist system.

'While the rap battles and feuds that go back to the Bronx vs. Queens in the '80s, Tupac vs. Biggie in the '90s or Nas vs. Jay-Z more recently may make for exciting lyrics (and real-life gun fights), the words and bullets are aimed at the wrong enemy.'

While the rap battles and feuds that go back to the Bronx vs. Queens in the '80s, Tupac vs. Biggie in the '90s or Nas vs. Jay-Z more recently may make for exciting lyrics (and real-life gun fights), the words and bullets are aimed at the wrong enemy. Rap artists are de facto leaders in black America. If these so-called black leaders put as much thought and planning into shooting at the bosses as they do into shooting at each other they would deserve our respect.

Racism, sexism and individualism undercut working-class consciousness and mass activism, but even for the bosses this causes problems. Young people today are so won to individualism that the concept of serving anything larger than one's self is quite rare. The capitalist concept of serving the nation is as foreign to many youth as the communist concept of serving the people. This is no good for a ruling class facing increasing rivalry and tangled in an endless occupation of the Middle East. This need to build loyalty to the state is behind the recent campaigns against the "n-word" and to "vote or die." These campaigns' failure to take root in the consciousness of working-class black youth indicates that more meaningful leadership is required. Our Party seeks to be the vehicle for that leadership. We have a mission for all the millions of angry youth — to reject individualism and replace it with loyalty to the international working class and to the fight for communism.

Our working class is desperately in need of a new culture. Where the bosses' culture is racist, ours must be anti-racist. Where it is sexist, ours must build unity between men and women. Where it teaches selfishness, our culture must constantly remind us of the meaning we can find fighting back together. While there are some undercurrents of counter-culture in hip-hop today, they remain under the sway of individualism and nationalist politics that obscure the class struggle. Our communist movement seeks to grow into a force that will inspire underground rappers with new vision, new vocabulary and new power. The battles in our cultural struggle will be won by fighting capitalist ways of interacting with our friends, criticizing capitalist culture, and making our own culture, like the recent PLP poetry book. In this fight and others, join us!✪

Underground Hip-Hop Still Under Capitalism

The vast majority of hip-hop music is never played on the radio so some workers and youth believe that Underground hip-hop can generally have a good political message. However, even countercultures are dominated by capitalist ideas.

Most underground that parades itself around as "conscious" is filled with nationalist ideas. Dead Prez's songs that attack the "white man's" schools and media build the illusion that if black bosses were in control workers would be better off. Talib Kweli and Mos Def's "Black Star" album saluted the businesses of Marcus Garvey who was as exploitative as any white capitalist and did little to change the horrid living conditions facing black workers in Harlem. On top of this, most Underground mimics the mainstream and perpetuates sexist and individualistic messages.

While it may seem overly negative to focus on the weaknesses of Underground rappers, it is important to remember that they can profoundly influence workers to support capitalism through dead-end reform. We need a culture and rappers who are rooted in the communist movement of the PLP to change this.✪

WHAT WE FIGHT FOR:

☆Progressive Labor Party (PLP) fights to smash capitalism — wage slavery. While the bosses and their mouthpieces claim "communism is dead," capitalism is the real failure for billions all over the world. Capitalism returned to the Soviet Union and China because socialism failed to wipe out many aspects of the profit system, like wages and division of labor.

☆Capitalism inevitably leads to wars. PLP organizes workers, students and soldiers to turn these wars into a revolution for communism — the dictatorship of the proletariat. This fight requires a mass Red Army led by the communist PLP.

☆Communism means working collectively to build a society where sharing is based on need. We will abolish work for wages, money and profits. Everyone will share in society's benefits and burdens.

☆Communism means abolishing racism and the concept of race.

☆Communism means abolishing the special oppression of women workers.

☆Communism means abolishing nations and nationalism. One International working class, one world, one Party.

☆Communism means the Party leads every aspect of society. For this to work, millions of workers — eventually everyone — must become communist organizers. Join Us!

CHALLENGE/DESAFIO (ISSN 0009-1049) published bi-weekly by Challenge Periodicals. 1 issue $.50. One Year: $15. Six months: $10. Send address changes to CHALLENGE Periodicals, GPO Box 808 Brooklyn, NY 11202. September 19 2007 Volume 40, No. 14

Mortgage Crisis Rips off Workers

continued from front page

LIBERALS: MAKE LITTLE BOSSES AND WORKERS PAY

U.S. rulers are debating ways to resolve this mortgage mess. The Bush gang wants a general bailout of all lenders, big and small. Bush's Federal Reserve recently lowered one of its key lending rates and eased lending limits at Bank of America and Citigroup, which enable the little guys to function. BoA, for example, subsequently pumped $2 billion into troubled upstart Countrywide Financial. Liberals, on the other hand, demand a purge of the small fry and stricter regulation by more powerful capitalists. Commenting on the Fed's moves, the New York Times August 28 editorial said, "Bailouts are tolerable only if...they're followed by punishing wrongdoers and imposing new rules and procedures that help to ensure that the same problems will not happen again." Establishment firms, including Lehman Brothers and Merrill Lynch, are waist-deep in bad mortgages. But the Times ran a long article (8/26) demonizing Angelo Mozilo, CEO of newcomer Countrywide as the root of all subprime evils. Mozilo, son of a Bronx butcher, first got rich in Florida in the 1960s by peddling mortgages to NASA's new employees at Cape Canaveral.

IMPERIALIST WAR ONLY WAY OUT FOR RULERS

The subprime debacle intensifies the growing rivalry among the world's imperialists. For one thing, it heightens the dollar-euro clash since both U.S. and European investors stand to lose. And a squeeze on profits at home puts further pressure on U.S. rulers to seize full control of the oil-rich Middle East. War, after all, is the capitalists' other favorite method for divvying up wealth and resources. A system that indiscriminately robs workers of their homes and livelihoods, as it subjects their children to war's horrors, has no right to exist. With bloodbaths widening on Wall Street and in Iraq, building for communist revolution holds far more promise for our class than any scheme the bosses can offer. If capitalists can't trust one another, why should we trust them?

Taxi Drivers Strike in NYC

NEW YORK CITY, September 5 — As we go to press thousands of taxi drivers have struck against installation of GPS in their cabs that would track drivers and control their every movement — a racist attack, especially since most NYC cabbies are black, Latino and immigrants, many from South Asia. A proposed credit card payment system would cost drivers 5% in charges funneled to the banks. ✪

Only 'Secure Pension' Is Communist Revolution

PHILADELPHIA, August 21 — "So what we gonna do?" asked the hospital ward clerk with fear in her eyes, referring to the latest development in the pension crisis for Local 1199C hospital workers here. She was concerned particularly about the pension problem. But her fear is universal for all workers, especially as we age: Do workers have any security under capitalism?

For a short time union workers at this hospital would probably have answered, "yes." Like this ward clerk, workers believed that if they could survive decade after decade of short-staffing, racism, sexism and layoffs, that they would ultimately reach that "Promised Land" of retirement on a pension.

Our union comprises largely black workers, especially women. Despite the latest cutbacks, our pension is still relatively high. In a city where so many black workers suffer horrible racist poverty, this pension seemed like a "permanent" golden promise to the aging nursing assistants and dietary, laundry and custodial workers.

But capitalism's inevitable patterns of war and fascism always smash workers' hopes and dreams. According to the U.S. Congressional Budget Office, the Iraq War costs $6 billion a month, about $200 million daily. U.S. capitalists also face increasing competition from rivals in Asia, Russia and Europe. This drives the bosses to stomp down labor costs like our wages and benefits. This is happening currently to retired autoworkers. Like our brothers and sisters working in basic industries, hospital workers' jobs and benefits are also under attack.

The Federal Pension Reform Act of 2006 requires that pensions be 80% funded permanently. Previously, pensions could be funded less than 100% as long as it appeared their liabilities could be covered over a 20-year period. Now, should pension funding fall below 80%, the employer has three choices:

(1) Increase the amount paid into the pension fund;

(2) Seek to reduce pension benefits;

(3) Discontinue the plan.

In response, our union leadership proposed we vote to divert 1% of the 3% wage raise due this past July 1 to the union Pension Fund to supposedly help keep the pension better funded. Only a small percentage of the 900 union members voted, but the majority did vote to divert the 1%. Nonetheless, the bosses of this hospital and another large teaching hospital refused to divert it.

The union members are now discussing our next step. However, most have no idea how our pensions or health benefits are funded. Many believe these benefits come from union dues. They don't know that the boss pays a certain percentage of the gross payroll to fund them. And many workers don't realize that the union members preceding them fought hard for these pension and health benefits.

Some of the 1199C members are beginning discussions in the locker-rooms and cafeterias on how we can educate union members on this issue, members who are quite intelligent but thanks to capitalism don't have great reading skills. Many who can read lack the confidence that they can understand and explain these things. One housekeeper emphasized that small meetings will be essential.

The uneven development and passivity among the members are also hotly debated. "They're f-----g scared!" complains a dietary worker. This provokes a heated debate about how we assess the members and their potential to become a militant fighting organization.

More troubling questions remain, even if we develop the understanding and militancy needed to protect

SELLING OUT

our pension. Do we really understand that, under capitalism, workers may win some victories, but the bosses must always try to take them away? After all, this pension fight is to protect something we were supposed to have already won. Do we understand that all pension funds are invested in the bosses' stock market? From July 23-27 alone, the stock market lost 4-7% of its value. This means that even if we succeed in winning money for the pension fund, we still face tremendous insecurity about where those funds are held!

"What we gonna do?" the ward clerk asked.

We must see that as wage slaves under capitalism we have no security. The bosses must maximize their profits by crushing our wages and living standards. The inevitable conflicts between bosses of different countries mean wars and fascist oppression. What we do need is more workers reading and distributing CHALLENGE and building Progressive Labor Party. For workers, the only "pension plan" with real security is communist revolution.✪

GI's Anti-War Sentiments, Actions Worry Brass



LOS ANGELES, September 1 — During the Summer Project here, a group of students and teachers visited a nearby military base. We distributed leaflets describing the potential power soldiers have, not only to end the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, but to smash the imperialist war machine and the profit system that breeds it. We called on soldiers to rebel and for military families to support student- and worker-led actions against the U.S.'s imperialist oil wars.

Although we had visited this base numerous times in recent years, we never got more than a dirty look from the Military Police (MPs). But this time the MPs called the cops five minutes after we arrived! Then the MPs came outside the base and into the middle of the street, waving cars past a stop sign to prevent us from approaching the cars entering the base. One MP continuously blew a whistle at stopped cars, yelling at them to keep going.

Despite the MPs efforts, many cars did stop and took several leaflets. One female soldier, when told that GI's had the power to stop the war, replied: "I'm retiring in a month, and I hope we can stop this war." Another soldier said he had served in Iraq and to this day had no idea why the U.S. was there. We told him it was for oil profits and empire, not for the interests of soldiers and workers. He took three leaflets.

With growing opposition to the war, both on the streets and in the barracks, the military brass is becoming more worried. Recruitment throughout the armed forces continues to miss its quotas. More and more family members of active GIs are speaking out against the war.

Most importantly, some soldiers are not only criticizing the war but actively organizing against it, in organizations like Iraq Veterans Against the War. Since the Vietnam War, the bosses know soldiers' potential for revolutionary action, and they're clearly nervous about the growing discontent, which offers an opening for PLP's communist politics. Many soldiers can be won to rebel against the whole capitalist system that creates exploitation, racism, sexism and wars for profit.

Increasingly soldiers are realizing the imperialist motives behind the U.S.'s oil-profit wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and can begin to understand that these wars don't benefit them or their families. But winning them requires consistent and hard work. Our outreach to them is crucial for building a revolutionary movement around PLP's ideas. Because of this reality, we plan to visit the base more regularly in the coming months.✪

Fight Columbia U. Racist Expansion into Harlem

NEW YORK CITY, Aug. 21 — The elitist Columbia University (CU) sits in the Upper West Side of Manhattan and is determined to expand north into Harlem, displacing affordable housing and small businesses. Columbia is using eminent domain and huge payoffs to obtain property, which is mainly occupied by poor- and lower-middle class African Americans. Even a Level 3 biotech lab, which houses dangerous microbes, is being planned. The rest of Harlem is being gentrified in anticipation of CU's move, with rents soaring over $2,000 for small apartments. The Manhattanville Clinic, a local facility which was closed five years ago and for whose reopening local anti-racist activists have been fighting, will probably be kept closed in anticipation of a lower population.

For years a coalition of community groups, housing advocates, student groups, local churches and others have been fighting CU, but the Mayor and City Council gave it the go-ahead to expand long ago. The struggle heated up last week at the local Community Board hearings. About 700 people showed up when Columbia presented its case, holding signs and booing loudly. When long-time Democratic party hack David Dinkins, once untouchable because he was the first NYC black Mayor, spoke in CU's favor, he was shouted down.

Over a hundred people gave militant speeches opposing Columbia's racism and greed, including several CHALLENGE readers active in local churches and schools. We pointed out how CU is a ruling-class institution, run by bankers and businessmen. They do research important to the military, ignoring the poverty around it except to use residents as subjects of racist research. The Violence Initiative was an example, conducting dangerous experiments on black and Latino children from the Bronx and upper Manhattan to "prove" genetic violence. They have also punished students fighting racism, as they did recently to those who stood up against the Minutemen. CU, with few supporters, bribed residents of a drug rehab program to hold up signs in their favor.

This week the local board voted against CU's plan. Although some of the community activists were jubilant, this "victory" is actually non-binding and meaningless, and they are planning to continue the fight. The only kind of struggle that would actually stop Columbia would be like what happened in 1968, when the university tried to build a gym in a nearby park. Large numbers of students occupied campus buildings and militant community residents supported them. That kind of movement does not exist now, but the hundreds that are involved are experiencing multi-racial unity and the futility of relying on politicians. Hopefully this coalition will hold together and grow more militant, as we solidify relationships and discuss the need to change the whole order of society, using CHALLENGE to point out that racism and war are necessary for the survival of capitalism and cannot be reformed away.

Convention Shows Vets Winnable to Anti-imperialism



ST. LOUIS, August 20 — Over 500 angry veterans gathered here at the annual convention of Veterans for Peace (VFP) and Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW). The growing number of vets and active-duty military joining these organizations proves that U.S. bosses are still haunted by "the Vietnam Syndrome" (the opposition of soldiers and workers to U.S. wars of aggression).

The U.S. ruling class is finding it increasingly difficult to convince the working class to fight and die in imperialist wars. Recent reports indicate West Point graduates are leaving in record numbers.

U.S. rulers have been forced to become very "creative" in building a fighting force, using a combination of religion, patriotism, economic incentives and citizenship for undocumented youth to entice recruits. They rely heavily on mercenaries such as Blackwater. They're recruiting from Mexico to Turkey to India for the soldiers they can't get at home. Here the military is offering $20,000 bonuses for anyone enlisting by year's end. As these tactics become less successful and the war for Mid-East oil continues, the possibility of a draft rises.

The VFP-IVAW conference demonstrated that the anti-war movement is growing and becoming more determined. But workers must be wary of the liberal-led anti-war movement. The conference's primary mission was to offer an acceptable outlet for soldiers' anger and frustrations, to divert our revolutionary spirit into "democratic reforms." For example, VFP called for a cabinet-level Department of Peace. One of the main presenters continuously pushed patriotism to the audience, a patriotism inherently racist in focusing on the death of U.S. soldiers, barely mentioning the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi workers' deaths.

When an Army recruiting exhibit was set up at the Black Expo next door to the convention, IVAW organized a "confrontation." They had vets fall into formation and chant, "war is not a game," a response to the Army's use of a video game to recruit young people. Unfortunately, this action did nothing to build the organization, engage workers, deter recruiting or stop the war. In fact, the action occurred so fast that very few people even realized what was happening. IVAW completed it and left the Expo even before security could respond.

Despite the reformist leadership, many rank-and-file members called for an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and revolutionary movement. These sentiments were highlighted in a well-attended workshop on imperialism. It countered the idea that the U.S. has "strayed" from its "mission of democracy" formulated in the Constitution. The workshop made it clear that the U.S. began as an exploitative slave society and has become the world's leading imperialist power.

Members discussed how the competitive nature of capitalism will forever create imperialist wars. For ExxonMobil to maintain its profits, it must keep control of Middle-East oil. It's a life-and-death situation for the capitalists and they will kill as many workers as it takes to stay in power.

Although there was a workshop on sexism in the military, sexism was rampant at the conference. Every evening IVAW held a party meant for its younger members. These parties included escapist drug use and the treatment of women as sexual objects. It was reported by some women that many male vets completely ignored or disregarded input from female vets. Workers must realize that sexism is deadly. It prevents men and women from uniting as a class in the fight against capitalist inequalities. Like racism, sexism only helps the bosses make super-profits and keeps workers divided. Sexism has historically been an obstacle in the struggle for communism; we must vigorously fight against it in reform organizations and in our own Party.

Regardless of its weaknesses, this conference offered inspiration. It indicated that soldiers and sailors are winnable to resisting within the ranks and, more importantly, to communist revolution. It showed the working class' fighting spirit and the necessity of organizing for revolution in the military. No revolution can succeed without rank-and-file soldiers, industrial workers and students. ✪

Brass Laments Workers' Lack of Passion for Bosses' Wars

Recently CHALLENGE has explained extensively how the liberal section of the ruling class is using control of key think-tanks and media to attack and undermine neo-con elements within the U.S. government. Another dimension to this growing movement is a fight within the U.S. military to assign blame for the fiasco in Iraq and learn lessons crucial to the success of future wars. This debate within the ruling class is important for communists and serious anti-imperialists to understand.

In April 2007, Lt. Col. Paul Yingling, deputy commander of the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment, published what Thomas E. Ricks called a "blistering attack on U.S. generals, saying they have botched the war in Iraq and misled Congress" (Washington Post, April 27, 2007). Such public attacks by officers on their superiors are very rare. However, Yingling's article was published in the Armed Forces Journal on April 27.

Yingling is no friend of the working class. He admires the former military greatness of the Prussian Army (the right-wing officer corps which became key leaders of the Nazi army in World War II). His main goal is to remake the U.S. military into a more reliable, effective tool of U.S. imperialist policy in the lead up to World War III. Ricks is part of Harvard's Senior Advisory Council on the Project on U.S. Civil-Military Relations. Ricks' involvement shows that bigger fish than Yingling are behind the desperate drive to rescue the bosses' armies from the Iraqi quagmire.

Yingling's article looks at war from a strategic class perspective. It is worth quoting at length:

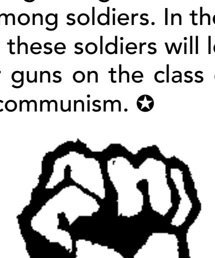
"The passion of the people is necessary to endure the sacrifices inherent in war. Regardless of the system of government, the people supply the blood and treasure required to prosecute war… Global conflicts such as WWII (World War II) require the full mobilization of entire societies… The greatest error the statesman can make is to commit his nation to a great conflict without mobilizing popular passions to a level commensurate with the stakes of the conflict."

Although he attacks Bush and Co. for squandering the "passions" aroused by 9/11, his main targets are U.S. generals. Yingling says they must be responsible for battle preparation and carrying out the plans developed. He sharply criticizes military leaders who are still fighting the "last war." He says generals must tell their civilian bosses what equipment and troop levels they need, given the demands of combat.

He calls Vietnam "the most egregious failure in the history of American armies," reflecting an old right-wing critique of Lyndon Johnson and the Democrats. In particular, he says U.S. Vietnam-era generals failed "to prepare their forces for counterinsurgency," to insist that many more troops were necessary for victory and to speak up as the strategy of the U.S. political leadership led to disaster.

Yingling also blasts U.S. generals in Iraq for not preparing for counterinsurgency, commiting sufficient forces to the war or planning for the stabilization of "post-war" Iraq. He attacks them for hiding the strength of the anti-U.S. insurgency from Congress (and, by implication, the public).

Communists know that the military will do the bosses' dirty work until we turn these forces into seething cauldrons of revolutionary anti-imperialist struggle. This is a long-term battle which we can and must win. Our immediate task is leading small acts of collective rebellion, combined with building a growing readership of CHALLENGE among soldiers. In the end, we are confident these soldiers will lead others to turn their guns on the class enemy in the fight for communism. ✪



Anti-Racists Blast Lying Anti-Arab Attacks

BROOKLYN, NY, August 20 — Today hundreds of anti-racists rallied at the city's Department of Education building here to protest months of vicious, lying racist attacks by the right-wing NY Post and NY Sun which have been running banner headlines since February smearing a new mini-school that will teach Arabic language and culture and emphasize international issues. These racists have equated anything Muslim with terrorism.



The school, scheduled to open September 4, is called the Khalil Gibran International Academy (Gibran was a Lebanese Christian and popular pacifist poet). The school's principal-to-be and chief organizer, Debbie Almontaser, emigrated 40 years ago from Yemen, and is a well-known NYC public school educator.

A racist blog labeled the Academy an "Al Qaeda School" and advocated burning it down with all the students inside. Media vans continually parked outside Ms. Almontaser's house. These threats led her to resign as principal. Although School Board Chancellor Klein and Mayor Bloomberg both endorsed and encouraged the school's development, they never defended her.

After 9/11, Ms. Almontaser worked in the interfaith community as a liaison between Muslims and other groups, including a Muslim/Jewish Dialogue Project. With many others, she protested the mass arrests, jailings, midnight raids and summary deportations of Middle-Eastern men. Her work led hundreds to defend her and the school.

The rally demonstrated broad rank-and-file support. Speakers included a rabbi, a black Baptist minister, a former member of the Board of Education, a parent, a young Muslim woman and a Latina involved in immigrant family support. Their anti-racist messages inspired many to shout their disgust at the bosses' racist press.

However, without a class analysis, there is no real victory. The rulers' media has been building anti-Muslim sentiment for years, even before 9/11, in order to win U.S. workers' support for endless oil wars in the Mid-East. Ironically, these same rulers need this school and people versed in the Arabic language and culture in order to better pursue their imperialist interests. That's why the school received backing from the liberal section of the ruling class — the Mayor, the Chancellor and the NY Times, and grant funding from the Bill Gates Foundation. This contradiction worked for the rulers; one section built racism and the other comes off as "good guys."

Communists involved in the organizing meetings have exposed the ruling class's role and its patriotic/nationalistic slogans, noting that these racist school bosses cannot be our friends. These bosses have attacked the overwhelmingly black and Latino students and veteran teachers by setting up small "theme" schools with no resources, libraries, gyms or support networks, while using metal detectors and cops to establish a prison-like atmosphere. They instituted charter schools as another union-busting tactic.

Well-meaning people saying "we" need the school to benefit "our" place in the world reflects this patriotism. This Academy's students will not necessarily be taught to help our working-class position in the world. But we learned that we can counter the media's racist attack with multi-racial unity.

We communists in this struggle will be present on the first day of school to protect the students from assault. We'll fight at all our schools to teach anti-racism and internationalism. Spreading CHALLENGE is central to this fight-back.✪

Racists Scapegoat LA Hospital to Junk Workers' Healthcare

LOS ANGELES, September 1 — The closing of King-Harbor Hospital in LA (formerly King-Drew) on August 19th will kill far more people than the handful of much-publicized deaths there that were used to "justify" shutting it down. King-Harbor was one of only four hospitals serving over a million mainly black and Latin workers in south Los Angeles with the second highest emergency room volume in the county.

The shutdown followed a racist and well-orchestrated two-year media campaign, coordinated with state and national accreditation and inspection institutions, that portrayed King-Drew as hopelessly dominated by corrupt or incompetent black physicians. The LA Times, in particular, caricatured the situation like the pro-KKK film "Birth of a Nation" distorted Reconstruction.

A PLP friend who has been active in the campaign to save the hospital said many other hospitals that are not "in the bulls-eye" have many similar problems. At Tarzana Hospital in the San Fernando Valley, a young woman was left lying on the floor in the emergency room to die much as happened to a woman at King Hospital. Fortunately she did not die, but the incident was just as bad and got no publicity at all. At well-respected Cedars Sinai Hospital, persons with money and celebrities are all treated very well on the exclusive "eighth floor" and ordinary workers are treated elsewhere as cattle.

Our friend attributes this situation to the LA County Supervisors "scapegoating King and South LA" because they "want to get out of the business of health care for the poor." Certainly that's part of the story, but the fact is that this hospital, won by mass anti-racist struggles in the past, was always underfunded (more on this in the next issue). And today, even though workers produce all value under captialism, they are getting even less back in return because of the increasing war budget the rulers need for their endless wars against rivals in the Middle East.

The LA Supervisors want to privatize the hospital, but say that if no buyer comes forward they "may" re-open it. But even if they do — whether because of a massive fight-back, back-room politics or a need for a population healthy enough to send youth off to war — the level of care in South Los Angeles will remain criminally inadequate.

So why isn't the SEIU and all the other unions as well as groups like the NAACP and the pro-immigration CHIRLA organization organizing mass protests against this closing? The leaders of these groups basically don't want to upset their Democratic Party hacks who are as guilty of the closing of King-Drew as Republican governor Schwarzenegger.

As PLP comrades and our friends join in the fight to reopen and transform King-Drew Hospital, we will explain how racism is built into capitalism as the cutting edge of the bosses' attack on the whole working class. And we will use this newspaper CHALLENGE-DESAFIO as the cutting edge of our attack on the racist profit system.✪

Transit Workers Cripple Parts of London



LONDON, September 5 — Thousands of transit workers crippled two-thirds of this city's subways for 48 hours in a strike that began two days ago and ended today when union leaders accepted government "guarantees" that the possible privatization of a collapsing maintenance company would not affect their jobs and pensions.✪

Black Factory Worker on CHALLENGE: 'Man, it's all true!'

(*The following are excerpts of conversations between a Summer Project participant and workers outside several factories.*)

"In my home town the PLA [People's Liberation Army] is very strong," said a young Filipino worker after being presented with CHALLENGE. I said, "Oh yeah! But we're different. We have the winning strategy of building a base for communist revolution in the industrial working class, since you guys are key not only for ending exploitation but also for building a new society run by the working class." After an extensive and positive discussion, he directed me to an older Vietnamese worker a few yards away.

I introduced myself and handed him a leaflet and CHALLENGE. "We're building a communist movement in which industrial workers like yourself play the leading role," I said. When I said the word "communist," he smiled. He started flipping through the paper, stopping to read parts of it. "That's right, communist," I said. "We're similar but different from those who kicked U.S. imperialism's butt in Vietnam." He smiled even more. "We're fighting for workers of the world to unite for the common cause of destroying capitalism for good," I said. We later saw him reading the paper even more intently.

As two Salvadoran women walked towards the factory entrance, they were also met with CHALLENGE and flyers. "What's this?" asked one. "It's a revolutionary communist newspaper that talks about not only fighting exploitation but ending it with workers' power," I responded in Spanish. "Give me one too," said one of the women who had not received it and added, "We have a lot of experience in fighting against exploitation."

On a second visit to yet another factory, as workers were leaving in their cars, an African American worker rolled his window down and said, "I already got one a few days ago." As he was driving away, I asked, "What do you think about it?" "Man, it's all true," he yelled out the window.

Thus far, one of the highlights was a conversation with an industrial worker who just returned from serving in the army in Iraq. Although he didn't say much, he continually nodded his head in agreement. I talked about inter-imperialist rivalry for the control of oil, stressing that it is always the working class that fights in these wars, never the bosses or their sons and daughters, and that industrial workers and soldiers are the ones who can turn the situation around. "In World War I workers and soldiers made a revolution in Russia and in World War II the same occurred in China, so this will happen again but with a better outcome if we build a base within the military and industrial working class for communist revolution."

There was an intense look in his eyes as he rolled CHALLENGE up and clutched it with a firm grip. Before he walked on, I shook his hand and said, "Thank you for your time." He responded, "No problem. Thank you."

These experiences make me think that the opportunities to build the Party among industrial workers and soldiers in the coming period are greater than I had originally thought.✪

New Orleans: 'Volunteerism not enough — we need a revolution...'

LOS ANGELES, September 2 — "In New Orleans this summer we went back to a house we'd gutted in 2006. When I saw that it was still boarded up and the whole neighborhood is deserted, it really struck home that our volunteer efforts weren't enough — we need a revolution to get rid of capitalism." With these words, a young woman sparked a vigorous debate at an event on "Katrina and the War" sponsored by a pacifist religious coalition. She was applauded when she talked about the important role of the shipbuilders in Pascagoola whose strike stopped three warships from going to the Persian Gulf.

The panel also included an Iraq Veteran and a young woman from the People's Organizing Committee in New Orleans. All were enthusiastically received by the audience of over 250.

The main speaker attacked "plantation capitalism" but mainly pushed anti-communism. He announced that "nothing good came from [the Russian revolution of] 1917" — although someone in the back shouted, "It was a good start!" — and insisted repeatedly that "we have to be nonviolent." A PL comrade led off the discussion by respectfully disagreeing, and condemning the racist and fascist attack on LA workers that the closing of King-Drew Hospital represents (see article above), and the exchange continued.

Eventually the pacifist leader said that "90% of a revolution is non-violent." But an audience member noted that defeating the Nazis involved massive violence, as did the fight to smash slavery. We can't beg or plead with those in power, or try to "sway their consciences" or even to "put pressure on them." We need to organize and fight with the goal of taking power away from the bosses and putting it in the hands of the working class, with class-conscious revolutionary soldiers and industrial workers in the lead.

The main speaker also objected to the comrade's reference to fascism in the U.S. "Fascism was a European development," he claimed, "we need to look to our own history." Nationalism like this "American exceptionalism" was one of the main political errors responsible for the reversal of the 1917 revolution and the communist movement it inspired. This same patriotism is desperately needed by the U.S. imperialists today as they build for wider war in the Middle East. We must reject it.

LA, Baghdad, New Orleans: Fight Racist Hospital Closings

The Party leaflet spotlighted the racist attacks on health care due to capitalist disregard for workers' lives and the imperialist war on Iraq:

"US-enforced 'sanctions' on Iraq destroyed its medical system, leaving half a million children dead…of radiation poisoning from U.S. "depleted uranium" weapons and preventable disease. Clinton's Secretary of State Madeline Albright said that it was worth it.' Meanwhile, 'Big Charity' Hospital in New Orleans — the main trauma center in southeastern Louisiana — was destroyed by Katrina. It won't be rebuilt, though the $350 million price tag for a new hospital could have been covered by New Orleans' share of the cost of the Iraq war. Instead it will be replaced with privately-owned clinics — exactly what's happening with LA's King-Drew Hospital, without a hurricane. We have to fight back against these racist attacks!" A racist system that robs workers of health care has to be destroyed with communist revolution.

The main speaker, a leader in the fight to save King-Drew, also told the audience to continue this fight. Meanwhile, a man from New Orleans – who eagerly received the PLP leaflet – was circulating a petition to rebuild 'Big Charity.' Later, a group made plans to attend the next health coalition meeting and get more involved in the fight to keep King-Drew open. Others plan to raise this fight in their unions.

Our Party has been involved in the struggle over King-Drew Hospital for several years. We raised the issue in some leaflets at the August 11 SEIU-sponsored LA health care rally. However, we did not respond quickly enough to the Board of Supervisor's August 10th vote and the August 19th closure of the hospital. Our role in the "Katrina/War" event helped to turn this around. The warm reception for communism and revolution among pacifist liberals has emboldened us to take our ideas, and our friends, into the movement to reopen King-Drew.✪

<LETTERS>

Immigrants Also Super-exploited in Spain

With a lot of debt to pay, and to help my mother and brothers I went to look for work in Europe since the economic situation workers face in El Salvador and worldwide is one of hunger and poverty. I went to Spain as many immigrant workers do, to find work to try to solve my basic needs and those of my family.

My first stop was in Mexico, where the cops started to treat a group of Salvadoran men and some Honduran women like delinquents. Some of us decided to confront the cops, forcing them to change their attitude to avoid a larger confrontation. The action of the group gave me strength to continue the trip.

After 14 hours of travel, I arrived in Madrid. An airport cop took my passport along with several others and then took some 25 of us to a room for interrogation. We all feared being deported. One Mexican man was sent back because he couldn't give an address where he would stay. The police asked me where I came from and how much money I had. When I said I had $1,500, the cop said, "Shit…that isn't enough for two days in Spain."

I finally got to my relative's house but he said he had no room for me so I had to sleep in a park for three days. Since my money was running low I decided to eat only once a day.

On the 4th day I went on the internet and contacted a friend who hooked me up with a friend of his in Spain. A short time later, I was in touch with the friend and he let me sleep on the sofa. I was very happy since it isn't easy sleeping outdoors and in very cold weather. The help of these people showed me again to trust in the solidarity of the working class anywhere in the world.

Spain is a beautiful country and the economy is geared a lot towards tourism (the bosses here have also made a lot of money in the last few years from a housing bubble that is about to burst like in the U.S., U.K., etc.). Since it is a capitalist country, just like the U.S., undocumented workers have to take on the worst jobs. Everything in Spain is very expensive, plus immigrants send a lot of money back home to support their families. As a new arrival, the only jobs available are giving out handbills in the street advertising businesses or in construction. Both jobs only pay 500 euros a month, which is very little in Spain. So as immigrant workers we have to "magically" manage to live on that and still send money back home.

Again, like millions of immigrant workers worldwide, I question whether the "dream" of finding a better life elsewhere was worth it. But I am also an internationalist member of PLP and no matter where I am I'll continue to struggle for a world without borders, where the wage slaves of today (workers) will run society — a communist world run by the dictatorship of the proletariat over the racist warmaking bosses of the world.

I'll continue to read DESAFIO-CHALLENGE and will share my experiences with workers here to organize against our oppression. I already contacted and am meeting with a group of immigrant workers discussing solutions to workers' problems worldwide. The conditions imposed by capitalism give us the opportunity to expand communist ideas and build the PLP in many parts of the world.

A Comrade

'A Dirty Little Secret': Poisoning 10 Million Japanese

(The following is an excerpt of a letter on maproom.com/journals/jsecret.htm)

A year ago, my uncle died. His last request was that he not be buried with military honors. This is why.

During the summer of 1945, a handful of Army Officers were engaged in "Operation Olympic," a plan to end the war against Japan by using poison gas in the event of an invasion of the homeland.

Major General William Porter of the Army's Chemical Warfare service developed a plan, with my uncle's assistance, to kill an estimated five million Japanese with poison gas. U.S. bombers would drop 75,000 tons of gas bombs per month in a gas blitz until most of the major cities in Japan were eliminated. When the initial landings were commenced, fighters equipped with spray tanks would attack enemy positions with a cocktail of lethal gases — including phosgene, mustard, hydrogen cyanide, and cyanogen chloride. There was no doubt that civilians would be targeted although the plan only mentioned troops.

Japanese buildings were mostly of wood and would absorb mustard gas and phosgene, making them uninhabitable. Poison could be absorbed through the skin or unprotected areas. Gas bombs were to be 500-pound high-explosive devices, to be dropped at night.

In April, 1944, my uncle produced a report stressing that the goal of the attack was "to create the maximum number of [civilian] casualties.... cripple transportation.... and [deny] public services...."One goal was to delay the repair of the infrastructure to make targets more vulnerable to conventional attacks — especially fire bombing. The U.S. had grown to appreciate the effects of fire storm attacks. The thinking was literally that if the victors wrote history, there was no need to explain why something was done.

In May 1945 the Chicago Tribune carried a headline "You Can Cook Them With Gas," declaring that the use of poison gas was neither inhumane nor worse than napalm/flame throwers. General George C. Marshall declared that "the character of the weapon is no less humane than phosphorous." In June 1945 the Army's Chemical Warfare Service submitted its Top Secret Report on the poisoning of Japan, listing 25 cities for destruction. Casualties "might easily kill 5,000,000 people and injure that many more..."

In June, Admiral Ernest King and General Marshall briefed President Truman about the possible use of poison gas during the invasion of Japan. But he knew something the other two did not. The Atomic Bomb was being readied.

By April 1945, over one million rounds of poisonous 105 mm shells, bombs and mines were available and in transit. The dropping of the Atomic Bomb made this useless. But as late as 1975, those 105 mm shells still sat and rusted by Runway One of the Denver Mile High Airport.

My uncle could never bring himself to admit that what he did during the war was as bad as anything the Nazis ever dreamed up. He did, however, decide that military service was not something he was proud of.

[By Douglas L. Frazier]

CHALLENGE COMMENT: The main imperialist countries all used saturation terror bombings of civilians in World War II: the Japanese fascists in China, the Nazis in the blitz of Britain and against the Soviet Union, the U.S. and the British Royal Air Force on Germany and the U.S. on Japan, including killing 100,000 in a fire-bombing of Tokyo. The U.S. also atom-bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, slaughtering upwards of 250,000.

Only the Soviet Union never bombed civilians, using its air power strictly against enemy armies.

Disagrees with 'Potter' Review

I have read all of the Harry Potter books except the current one (reviewed in CHALLENGE, 9/5). I don't feel these books promote racism. Actually, the most positive aspect of Rowling's novels is anti-racism. Hogwarts is an integrated school with no evidence of racial animosity.

Rowling is basically a liberal; her politics come across in these novels. However, she's also a billionaire now and quite possibly one of the wealthiest women on the planet, so obviously she would defend a system that has made her filthy rich. I think the CHALLENGE review made some good points and will keep them in mind when I get to read "The Deathly Hollows." But I don't think the Potter books are necessarily "garbage," despite the fact they reinforce the values of the exploitative capitalist system.

On the one hand, I see them as imaginative fantasy that offers escape for a spell from this hard life. On the other hand, I can see where one might view them as bourgeois ideological drugs. Yet, it's obvious that many young people, and also older people, are enjoying these books. It's lousy to see what a money-making scheme the whole thing has become. But I believe strongly in the development of the imagination and think it can and will become a "subversive" force.

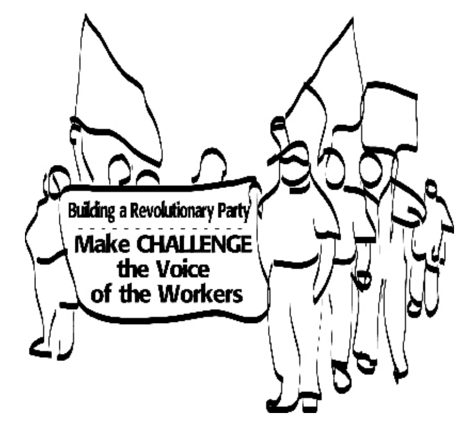
Finally, in a communist society I can envision some writers creating works of fantasy that will show the way forward, while entertaining workers of all ages.

On another point: I agree with the assessment of the UMWA [United Mine Workers] in the article on the Utah mine disaster. I had written to CHALLENGE claiming the union would fight for unionization. Now I don't see any sign that the hot shots running the UMWA will do much for coal miners. The local head honcho in my area spends most of his time either on the golf course or talking about organizing sweatshops in China.

Red Coal

Chavez No Solution for Workers

A worker was talking to a pseudo-revolutionary (a revisionist) who was selling supposedly revolutionary books and posters. He was enthusiastically pushing a book called "21st Century Socialism" about Hugo Chavez as the solution to workers' problems. The worker was listening to him attentively, so I decided to join the conversation to refute what this guy was saying, to talk about revolution because this guy never mentioned the need for armed struggle to win workers' power.



"To make a real change in society, we workers need to make a real communist revolution and take power," I interjected. "You're right," said the revisionist, "We're doing it now with Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales, Daniel Ortega, etc. They're following the example of Fidel Castro, with the difference that they haven't shot any guns and they're making changes that help the poorest people."

He emphasized the healthcare program Hugo Chavez shares with some other countries. The construction worker agreed enthusiastically about this, describing a relative who had been sent from his own country to Venezuela for free medical treatment.

"With a sick person on the verge of death, any help is good," I said, "but this doesn't mean Chavez represents the interests of the working class. In Venezuela, there's capitalist exploitation and the division of social classes into rich and poor. These government programs are a bribe to maintain ideological control over the exploited, protect the interests of the rich, and spread the Venezuelan bosses' influence throughout Latin America.

"With socialism," I continued, "the exploitation of workers continues, along with the division of social classes. The 'cooperatives' that socialism promotes are a farce because they always function within the capitalist market. Where they've developed, they've become breeding grounds for capitalism, employing and exploiting workers, just like in any company for profit. The only solution is communism," I concluded, "because under communism, the workers will control the means of production and they'll decide what to produce for the benefit of the entire working class."

"You can't talk to the workers about communism," he said, "because in these times, who will understand you? That's why it's the intellectuals who are key to revolution. For example, El Ché, Lenin, Fidel, etc. Because of their socioeconomic conditions, the workers will follow those intellectuals."

"We can't underestimate the workers," I replied, "because we're capable of understanding the importance that we have in the capitalist system. For example, who are the ones who work in the different industries? Who goes into the army and defends the interests of the rich? The intellectuals and students are necessary and important, but the key sector for a real communist revolution is the workers. We workers can and must understand communist ideas in order to build and lead a new communist society," I said.

After several minutes, I turned away and I waited for the construction worker to do likewise. Later I spoke with him alone, explained more about communist ideas and said I'd like to talk more. I gave him CHALLENGE and we exchanged phone numbers so I can visit him at home. We've already spoken several times and plan to see each other soon.

A Communist Worker

Vets Expose Liberals' Patriotism

Recently I traveled to St. Louis, Mo., to attend the Veterans for Peace convention. I've been active in Military Families Speak Out (MFSO) since 2003. Through my activism, I have worked with several members of Iraq Veterans against the War, (IVAW), planning local antiwar activities. I knew people from all of these groups would be attending the convention, and that many of them were tired of the racism, sexism, pacifism and patriotism that have permeated the antiwar movement.

Party members and friends attended many of these workshops with folks that we have been working with over the past year, raising our ideas and opinions. We were all excited about the reception we got, and we made many new friends who came up to us afterwards and wanted to talk more.

Specifically, quite a few people openly disagreed with David Cortright's speech on Thursday evening. He said that patriotism and nationalism were separate ideas; nationalism is wrong, but patriotism is good. In other words, we should love our country but oppose the war. The war

continued on next page

<More Letters >

is a mistake the otherwise “good bosses” are making. By opposing it, we become true patriots. This dangerous idea is raised a lot within the “peace movement.” We must point out that imperialist war is always on the horizon for the ruling class. All the bosses’ wars are bad for the world’s workers.

The highlight was the opportunity to openly and collectively discuss the Party with soldiers and vets. This was a big step forward, opening up more opportunities for struggles with our base. A high-point for me was seeing my friend in IVAW stand up several times to raise the importance of fighting racism, and working more to win working-class, rank-and-file soldiers and their families on or near bases.

Of course, I’m sure that the ruling class is meeting somewhere at this moment to plan to attack any communists and other troublemakers who would ruin their plans to push racism and patriotism in the working class, and especially in the military. They are desperate to maintain power in the Middle East, using oil to not only make profits but also to insure that they are players in the deadly game against China, Russia, and Europe to dominate the world’s economy.

We have a huge task ahead of us. These reformist organizations are where we need to be active right now, because we can win fellow workers, soldiers and youth to revolution.

From a Military Mom

Detroit Rebellion ‘Shaped my life…’

Forty years ago, the eyes of the world were on Detroit. For a week, it became the central battlefield in the fight against racism. Tens of thousands of workers and youth engaged in an integrated uprising against police terror and racist unemployment. While the battlefield and the times have changed, like Gettysburg, Harpers Ferry, Soweto or Stalingrad, Detroit remains hallowed ground for anti-racists everywhere.

For that week in July, the main struggle here became between rich and poor, exploiter and exploited, boss and worker, oppressor and oppressed.

I asked my son, who was born and raised here and is starting high school in the fall, if his school teachers ever talked about 1967 or if he knew anything about what happened. He said, “No.” The bankers and billionaires just don’t steal our wages, jobs, and futures, they steal our past. Only we can and will pass on the rich history of our struggles to our young people.

There are many rich lessons the rebellion has to offer. The rebellion showed that the police can terrorize us individually, but they are no match for a fighting working class. As Mao said, “A single spark can start a prairie fire.” Mass heroism, the role of mass violence against racism; the revolutionary role of black workers and youth leading all workers and youth and the key role of industrial workers and auto workers became a beacon of inspiration for our class. Maybe the most important lesson is the need for a mass, international revolutionary communist movement to smash the racist profit system.

The 1967 Detroit Rebellion touched me. As a teenager in the Bronx, NY, just graduating high school and becoming more political, I was gripped by the rebellion. I watched on TV and read every newspaper. I heard one newscaster say, “Today Mao Tse Tung and the Chinese Communist Party issued a statement saying, ‘We support the black rebels in Detroit.’” The newscaster was horrified. I was blown away. The Detroit Rebellion helped move me onto the road to revolution for a lifetime. A few years after the rebellion I moved to Detroit to help finish the job that has proven longer and more complicated than any of us thought back then. Nevertheless, on a personal level, I am who I am in part because of what happened here, forty years ago.

A Reader

::New on the ::PLP website

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A COMMUNIST: COMMUNISTS ARE MADE, NOT BORN
by Epifanio Camacho

Camacho tells of his early years growing up among peasant families in Mexico in the 1920s. They lived in poverty, but the families survived by trading goods and services without the use of money. When his mother died he was sent to live with an older married sister and suffered cruel exploitation from both his brother-in-law and from bosses for whom he was made to work in his early teens.

In his 30s he moved to Texas and worked a variety of jobs, moving to Arizona and finally California, where he settled into agricultural work. He learned from experience that each boss robbed him at every opportunity and realized that his oppression and exploitation weren’t unusual and that all bosses use workers only as sources of wealth.

He and Cesar Chavez formed the United Farm Workers of America (UFWA), but he saw that Chavez’s religion and pacifism brought farm workers nothing but defeat. Chavez relied on politicians, who deceived him and the farm workers at every turn. Chavez tried to have Camacho jailed and blacklisted for his uncompromising leadership of the workers during strikes. He describes how violence by workers against scabs led to success, while Chavez’s pacifism led to defeat.

Camacho grappled long and hard with the contradiction between his belief in god and the injustice of bosses’ getting away with robbery and murder, protected by the government, while millions of workers live in misery, forced to fight just to survive.

First believing Chavez’s lies that communists are the workers’ enemies, he finally met PLP and discovered that, while in his head he had been anti-communist all his life, in his actions he had, without knowing it, really been a communist. He joined PLP and brought many workers into the Party. Together they sold thousands of copies of CHALLENGE throughout the central California valley. Camacho was brought onto the PLP Central Committee.

His sick wife pulled at his conscience, until she died, leaving him and his three children alone. She had been a Jehovah’s Witness but always supported Camacho in his struggles against the growers and against Chavez.

Camacho ends with some thoughts about strikes and general strikes: how they can lead to revolution for working-class power, and ultimately for a communist system, free of exploitation, racism, sexism, poverty, and war.

ALSO ON THE WEB:

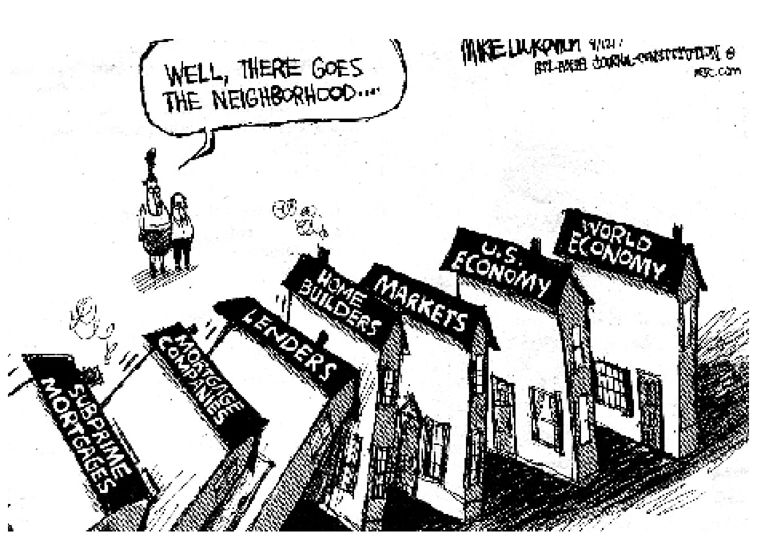
• How capitalism worsened the damage and human suffering caused by the earthquake in southern Peru and Hurricane Dean in the Caribbean and Mexico.

• A refutation of the new alliance between Pete Seeger, the fake leftist folk singer and the rabid anti-communist Ronald Radosh repeating the old tiresome slanders against Stalin and the fight for a revolutionary society without capitalism.

GO > PLP.ORG

RED EYE ON THE NEWS

Below are excerpts from mainstream newspapers that may be of use for our readers. Abbreviations: NYT=New York Times, GW=Guardian Weekly, LAT=Los Angeles Times



NY Communist wrote ‘Strange Fruit’

I had always assumed that Billie Holiday composed the music and lyrics to “Strange Fruit.” She did not. The song began life as a poem written by Abel Meeropol, a schoolteacher who was living in the Bronx…. Meeropol was a trade union activist and a closet member of the Communist Party; his poem was first published in 1937 as “Bitter Fruit,” in a union magazine….

Meeropol was motivated to write the poem after seeing a photograph of two black teenagers, Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith, who had been lynched in Marion, Indiana, on August 7, 1930. Their bodies were hanging limply from a tree. His poem opens with the following lines:

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Hoping to reach a wider audience, Meeropol set his poem to music, and the song “Strange Fruit” was first performed at a [meeting of the old communist-led] New York City Teachers Union... It created an immediate stir….

When Meeropol was asked, in 1971, why he wrote the song, he replied: “Because I hate lynching and I hate injustice and I hate the people who perpetuate it.” (GW, 8/31)

History tries to erase Red successes

The communist movement….which came to control a third of the planet in a generation, was the most important political movement of the past century. It carried out what other socialists had only talked about, abolishing capitalism and creating publicly owned, planned economies. Its…failures are now so [well-publicized] that they are in danger of obliterating any understanding of its achievements — all of which have lessons for the future…search for a social alternative to globalized capitalism. It was a communist state, after all, that played the decisive role in the defeat of Nazi Germany, and communists, who led the resistance in occupied Europe…delivered rapid industrialization, mass education, full employment and unprecedented advances in social and gender equality….

[Author] Service’s insistence that communist power had to be based on repression because it lacked consent is crudely misleading….In a period when most of the world was under colonial rule or capitalist dictatorships, there was mass support for these regimes, though it waxed and waned….

While the form that communism took in the 20th century will never be repeated, radical movements will emerge — and already are — to challenge the world’s grotesque and growing inequality and its domination by a handful of great powers. (GW, 5/25)

US policy remains: Bases and Oil

Most of the Democratic leaders and presidential candidates now seem to feel that in one or another way the U.S. must stay in Iraq….

The underlying American policy, largely of long-term Pentagon conception, is to ring the world with bases from which American forces can provide international and national “security” globally, while surveying and assuring the provisions of energy and raw materials to the U.S. None of this is going to be given up except under extreme duress.

Hence the Petraeus…report undoubtedly will say that the mission is still difficult but can be done, and they will cite the usual reasons why the U.S. can’t withdraw. (William Pfaff, Tribune Media, 8/19)

Vets can’t get old jobs back

Tens of thousands of members of the National Guard and reserves who are called up to serve in Iraq…often find their civilian jobs gone….

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)….is supposed to protect reservists’ civilian jobs for up to five years of military service. But….the average time service members have to wait for USERRA complaints to be resolved is…nearly two years….

In 2005, of the 5,302 complaints filed by reservists,…only 16 resulted in benefits going to reservists. (LAT, 8/5)

Dems also follow corporate money

Washington is all about money….”Upon leaving office…more than half of the senior officials in the Clinton administration became corporate lobbyists.” (NYT, 9/3)

PLP History: Fighting Fascists in Boston Busing Struggle

(Part I of a three-part series)

In the mid-1970s, the U.S. rulers tried using a violently racist anti-integration movement in Boston as a trial balloon for developing a mass, nationwide base for fascism. They suffered a significant political and tactical defeat, largely due to the work of the Progressive Labor Party and its allies in the International Committee Against Racism.

The lessons from this struggle remain valid today. They belong to the living history of communism and the working class.

The eye of the storm was busing for school desegregation. The Kennedy machine and its local vassals in city government, led by Mayor Kevin White, spouted the usual liberal line about civil rights and integration. Federal Judge W. Arthur Garrity, a former Kennedy political hack, issued a court order requiring the busing of more than 18,000 children.

Meanwhile, White and his liberal apparatus did everything possible to ensure that the busing of these children would spread maximum racist division within Boston's working class.

This sabotage occurred in two ways. First, White & Co. slashed the Boston school budgets and laid off 600 provisional and non-tenured teachers, thereby even further overcrowding the classrooms in the city's schools and aggravating the already terrible conditions in many. Second, the White-Kennedy apparatus gave a blank check for violence to the existing racist movement, which it had been coddling for over a decade.

By the time Garrity issued his court order, these thugs were calling themselves ROAR (an acronym for Restore Our Alienated Rights), but they had been doing their dirty work for years. Led by Louise Day Hicks — who had been elected to Congress as a Democrat from 1971-73, and was backed behind the scenes by Kennedy-White — the racists took control of the Boston School Committee in the 1960s. They spent years creating segregated school zones and simultaneously presiding over the universal degeneration of Boston's schools.



In the months just prior to the '74-'75 school year, ROAR mobilized thousands in public anti-busing marches and received free, uncritical publicity from local and national media. ROAR was so brazenly coddled by White, the cops and the bosses' government that it dared convene its meetings in the chamber of the Boston City Council, of which Hicks was a member and would later become president.

When the first school busses started rolling in September 1974, the children on them were greeted with volleys of rocks and other assaults from ROAR-led racist mobs, who also committed random assaults on many black people who happened to be on the streets during those days. The Boston Police Department did nothing to prevent these atrocities.

Despite its small size, PLP's Boston chapter took a stand. It recognized the collusion between the liberals and the gutter racists and wrote leaflets and pamphlets exposing the role of Kennedy, White, Garrity & Co. in the use of court-ordered busing as a vehicle for provoking racist discord. But merely exposing this collusion wasn't enough. If ever a situation existed when one had to take a stand on an issue, this was it. A massive, sustained, and vicious racist assault was occurring. Communists and anti-racists had to oppose it.

PLP CHALLENGES 'ROAR'

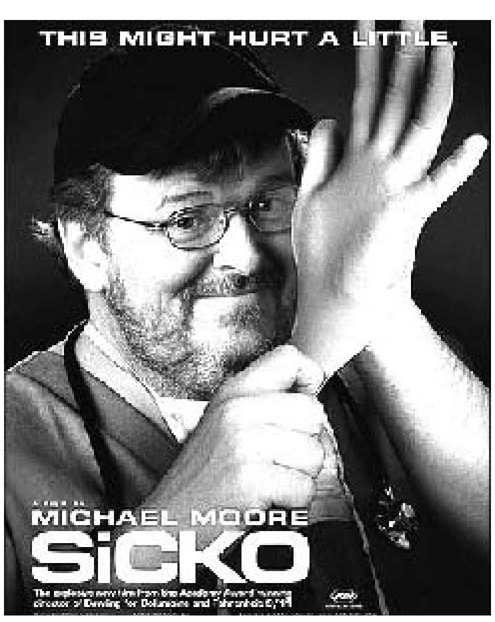
On the opening day of school in September, 1974, PLP threw down the gauntlet at ROAR. A multi-racial group of PLP members and friends assembled at South Boston High to welcome the bused students to school and defy the fascists. Their very presence and boldness served notice on ROAR that they were in for a fight. During the early days of that school year, PLP members were on the front lines calling for multi-racial unity and mass, militant mobilization to crush ROAR. There was some violent struggle; a number of PLP'ers were arrested.

Although this activity was commendable, the situation called for a still more drastic mobilization. The implications went far beyond Boston. If the bosses could get away with letting ROAR run amok in Boston, the "Athens of America," then Klansmen and gutter racists everywhere could feel emboldened, and the bosses themselves would have a valuable instrument to attack workers when fascism became the order of the day. The stakes were high indeed.

Therefore, PLP's central leadership decided to organize the 1975 May Day march in South Boston, an area which had become an international symbol of racist violence.

(Next: May Day 1975: "Death to Fascism!")

'SICKO' Ignores Racism, Helps Ailing Bosses



Michael Moore's "Sicko" delivers a sharp critique of the "health care" industry's inability to meet the medical needs of most people in the United States. The movie is full of memorable images. An uninsured man sews up a wound on his own leg with needle and thread. A weeping woman is dropped by her insurance company because her cancer required too many treatments. A firefighter who worked tirelessly at the toxic World Trade Center site is now unable to afford the medications he needs to breathe. Moore's puzzled voice-over continually wonders, "Why do we allow this to happen?" He points to the profit-driven callousness of the pharmaceutical industry and private health insurance companies, which view success as evading payment for customer's medical costs. Moore then makes a contrasting tour of countries with free or low-cost medical treatment and drugs. His point is that the inhumane set-up in the United States is not divinely ordained; other ways of delivering health care are possible, and in fact prevail elsewhere.

While "Sicko" legitimately condemns the drive for profits that sickens and kills millions of people in the United States, there is a reason the movie is getting such widespread distribution and respect from reviewers in the capitalist-run press. Moore's movie contains a brief on behalf of so-called single-payer health insurance. There are many major corporations that now wish to transfer to the taxpayers the cost of the healthcare needs of their retired workers. A battle is brewing between the powerful insurance and pharmaceutical companies and the politicians they have lobbied versus most other businesses and mainly liberal politicians who think more strategically about the overall needs of capitalism. Moore's position as the "left" in the debate over private-versus-public health care obscures this fundamental issue and closes off critique from communists.

In its intended appeal to all working-class people, the movie glosses over the racist nature of the health care delivery system in the U.S. The "we're-all-in-the-same-boat" portrayal ignores the fact that multiracial unity needs to be built in an active fight against the racial differentials in the care received by wealthier/white people and poorer/brown and black people.

In its contrast of the U.S. with Canada, Great Britain, and France, "Sicko" ignores the fact that these wealthy, relatively white countries profit from the super-exploitation of mainly non-white workers elsewhere in the world. The dispossessed in most of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, who suffer even worse conditions than U.S. workers, are invisible in Moore's movie. "Sicko" is premised on nationalism.

Moore claims that a humane system can be gotten by a change of heart, faith in democracy and voting. Tony Benn, a British Labor MP, says British universal health care was obtained after World War II because "democracy" moved power "from the wallet to the ballot;" "solidarity" supposedly dictated social policy. Benn ignores the utter lack of "solidarity" in the British government policies toward the colonial peoples under its rule at that time. Moore obscures the fact that the social benefits won by workers in post-war Europe came from sharp, prolonged class struggle, and from the capitalist ruling classes' need to counter the example of Soviet socialism by making concessions to workers.

Many left-inclined people are excited by the sympathetic portrayal of Cuba. (Moore takes very ill U.S. workers to Cuba where they are treated as comrades and given the treatment they need.) This example shows that not only the wealthy industrialized nations can supply decent health care: any society committed to citizen welfare can achieve this goal. But Moore's argument centers on the capitalist "democracies" as templates for his social-democratic vision; Cuba is a side issue, a bone tossed to the left.

Finally, Moore's snapshot approach to history ignores the mounting attack on the welfare state even in the "fortunate" bourgeois democracies, as globalized capitalism creates a race to the bottom, in which the benefits of workers are being eroded. Sarkozy's recent election in France, for example, has been accompanied by promises of belt-tightening to become "more competitive;" the handwriting is on the wall for Moore's favorite French health care policies.

When workers should be skeptical of democracy and voting, aware of the need to engage in class struggle and open to the ideas of communism, Moore encourages us to play by the rules of the existing system. "Sicko" is not part of the cure, but another manifestation of the disease — capitalist oppression and the ideologies by which it is legitimized.✪